



Thank you for attending The Hat Dance at FDIC 2026! As staffing continues to be one of the greatest challenges facing fire departments across the country, the demands of the modern company officer continue to grow. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to overcoming our staffing shortfalls, investing in preparation and the execution of fundamental skills provides the adaptability necessary to overcome the realities of limited manpower. The key points below are intended to help focus your time on and energy to maximize your capabilities with available staffing. Apply these suggestions in accordance with your department's policies and procedures. I hope this course provided actionable information to bring back to your department. If you have any questions or would like more information on this or any of my programs, my contact information is included. Thank you again!

Sincerely,

Marc Aloian

Background

Departments across the country continue to struggle to maintain adequate staffing. Adequate staffing is generally associated by the staffing and deployment recommendations specified in NFPA 1750. However, short-staffing has become normal staffing for many departments who have 3 or fewer personnel are assigned to an apparatus or are unable to assemble necessary manpower to mitigate an incident in a timely manner.

While budget constraints and retention difficulties have reshaped the realities of staffing, previous studies make a definitive link between staffing levels and efficient fireground operations. These studies found an approximately 1-minute difference in accomplishing most fireground tasks for every person added or subtracted from the crew, with a more profound impact on search which is approximately 3-minute difference per person. Some staffing studies can be accessed here:

<https://www.nist.gov/el/fire-research-division-73300/firegov-fire-service/staffing-studies>

https://www.nist.gov/system/files/documents/el/fire_research/Report-on-Residential-Fireground-Field-Experiments.pdf

<https://fsri.org/research>

The strategies, tactics, and accompanying curriculum of many professional development programs do not reflect our staffing models. Many programs for prospective company officers focus largely on administrative and disciplinary prowess, with little emphasis on how to supervise as a functional member of a team. As decreasing tenures combine with reductions in staffing, development is being rushed while more responsibilities are added to company level supervisors who may lack the experience and expertise necessary for these positions. As a result, the company officer must prepare to wear multiple hats in support of the mission and the organization.



Realities of Short-Staffed Company Officers

- The fire service remains willfully ignorant to its staffing shortfalls.
- Promotions are happening earlier while development is happening later.
- The Company Officer's job is to prepare their personnel and equipment for reality.
- The Company Officer will be hands-on with limited staffing.
- The challenges of limited staffing extend beyond the fireground.

Core competencies of the Company Officer

- Decisive
- Patient
- Adaptable
- Teachable
- Humble

Operational considerations

- What is your game plan based on your staffing?
- Does your staffing change frequently and require multiple game plans?
- How can you adapt tactics to staffing?
- Try to see 3 sides of building on arrival.
 - Location and access of fire and victims?
- What is your water supply?
 - What can be accomplished before your run out?
- How can you marry companies to maximize your personnel?
- How can you set up your equipment and apparatus to expedite operations?
- What skills can be accomplished by a single firefighter?
- Are your driver operators and administrative personnel utilized during operations?

Training considerations

- Are you training with the same number of personnel you will have on a run?
- What equipment, apparatus, and facilities can you utilize for training?
- What can you build or acquire to aid in training?
- Are you using "game film" from training/runs to identify areas of improvement?
- Are you training for hours or outcomes?
- Does your training incorporate some level of adversity?



Officer considerations

- Cannot neglect officer responsibilities.
- Will likely have additional duties.
- Must balance relationships to remain effective in officer role.
- Must establish effective time management techniques.
- Must maintain personal and professional goals.
- Must incorporate some type of stress relief.

Parting thoughts

- The incident doesn't change to our staffing.
- We must prepare Company Officers for reality.
- Low staffing requires proactive approaches.
- You can't talk a fire out.
- Being short staffed isn't a badge of honor.

If you are interested in bringing The Hat Dance or any of my other course offerings to your department or training group, my contact links are below. I hope you enjoyed the class and FDIC! Thank you again for choosing The Hat Dance!



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